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T. A. Bennett

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AS the accumulating tragedies of the aftermath of war gather fatally one on another, a puzzle and a mystery to the thoughtless masses whose imperfect eyes seek in vain for the cause, the old dead ache that we have borne for these last interminable years, the old dead ache that it is our dream to outlive breaks out now and again in new and cruel crises. Such a crisis was the death of Sir William Osler, as much a tragedy of the war as if he had fallen by the side of his boy, "forward as fits a man."

Son of a canon of the Church of England, born in Bond Head, Ontario, in 1849, he was at the outset destined for the clergy, but his inclination carried him toward medicine, and after four years in Toronto and Montreal he graduated at McGill University in 1872. For the two years following he studied in London, Berlin, and Vienna, and in 1874 he returned as lecturer and later as professor of the Institutes of Medicine at McGill University. In 1884 he was called to the University of Pennsylvania as Professor of Clinical Medicine, and in 1889 to the Johns Hopkins University as Professor of Medicine and Physician in Chief to the Johns Hopkins Hospital. In 1905 he left America to become Regius Professor of Medicine and Student of Christ Church at Oxford. Such is a brief outline of his academic career. He held honorary degrees from a large number of American and foreign universities, ~~and~~ ^{He} was a Fellow of the Royal Society.

In the two years spent in Europe he made important original studies on the blood. Wherever he went his devotion to work, his remarkable power of observation—for throughout his life he was an observer rather than an experimenter—his extraordinarily quick grasp of the significance of that which he saw or read, his clear vision and sound, sane judgment, his simplicity and sincerity and hon-

esty impressed his colleagues and the public, and he came to be much sought for as a consultant.

In 1892, after a year of intensive work, he published his treatise on "The Practice of Medicine," which, largely because of its rare personal quality, because it represented the fruits of actual observation and experience, has been for so many years the standard text book of medicine in America. He delivered many lectures before learned societies, the Goulstonian lectures in 1885, the Cartwright lectures in 1886, the Harveian lecture in 1906. He published a number of short volumes on different medical subjects—chorea, cancer of the stomach, angina pectoris—and a very large number of notes on a great variety of pathological conditions observed in his constant clinical activities. He delivered many addresses and was the author of a considerable number of charming and valuable historical and biographical essays.

His work in the organization of the new medical clinic at the Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1889, his insistence that, for the proper care of the patient as well as for the improvement of the teaching of medicine, the student should be used, as in England and France, as an assistant in the wards, and his practical abandonment of ~~the~~ barren didactic methods were steps of great importance in the advancement of medical instruction and in the improvement of hospitals in America. These were notable achievements; they have been abundantly recounted in the last few weeks. But if one turn to the notes of those who knew him and were close to him, such as the tributes by eighteen of his associates in the *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin* for July, 1919, he may perhaps be struck by the lack of stress laid on the scientific and material aspects of his work; for it was in the human side of this man that lay his true greatness. It is probable that there has, in America, been no medical man so universally revered, no man whose power, whose inspiration has reached so many, no man so loved. Wherein lay the secret of this power? What was the manner of the man?

His father was Cornish, and Osler was a true Celt. A Celt in appearance, not large, of a very dark, almost olive complexion, with a rather long, drooping black mustache—a Celt in his charming vivacity and brilliancy and in his sparkling wit. Not large, but well built, with a wiry, ath-

letic figure, a long, swinging, active gait, a peculiarly mobile face, serious and almost stern when at rest, with deep, dark brown eyes with an irresistible humorous twinkle; deep clear eyes, so clear that although they might sometimes seem unfathomable, they told at a glance of a pure, kindly, loyal spirit behind. As a teacher he was wholly simple and devoid of circumstance or of the least attempt at studied eloquence or theatrical effect. He taught mainly by the bedside. His alert eye missed little. His few, kindly, often droll words gained the early confidence of the patient, and kept the student on his tiptoes. His talks in the wards were replete with epigrams. The right adjective, often quaint and unusual, was always on the tip of his tongue, and to a rare degree he possessed the power to inspire in the patient confidence, courage, and hope; in the student, enthusiasm.

The equanimity that he preached he ~~likewise~~ exemplified. "Let not the *Crooked Things* that *can't be made streight* encumber you," said Cotton Mather.* Few followed this wise maxim as did Osler. Of the hopeless and irritating dilemma he always saw the humorous aspect and 'twas dismissed in the twinkling of an eye, with the one word that might almost—indeed sometimes did—accomplish the seemingly impossible. These "Oslerisms," as his disciples called them, were a delight to his pupils. Indeed, at one time two had almost published a collection.

Plus je songe à la vie humaine, plus je crois qu'il faut lui donner pour témoins et pour juges l'Ironie et la Pitié, comme les Égyptiens appelaient sur leurs morts la déesse Isis et la déesse Nephtys. L'Ironie et la Pitié sont deux bonnes conseillères; l'une, en souriant, nous rend la vie aimable; l'autre, qui pleure, nous la rend sacrée. L'Ironie que j'invoque n'est point cruelle. Elle ne raille pas ni l'amour ni la beauté. Elle est douce et bienveillante. Son rire calme la colère, et c'est elle qui nous enseigne à nous moquer des méchants et des sots, que nous pouvions, sans elle, avoir la faiblesse de haïr.†

This gentle "*Ironie*," for which we have no word in English, this gentle "*Ironie*" which neither wounds nor embitters—how well he understood it! In nearly thirty years of friendship, in fifteen years of daily association with Osler, I never heard from his lips an unkind word about a brother

**Manuductio ad ministerium*, etc. 12°. Boston, Hancock, 1726, p. 147.

†Anatole France: *Le Jardin d'Epicure*, p. 121.

practitioner. He saw and he appealed to the best in every man. More than this, no one could speak ill of his neighbor in his presence. He who forgot himself once never did so again. One evening among the group of students who gathered about his table on Saturdays, an old college mate began to ridicule a colleague. In a moment Osler turned, and pointing to the photograph over his fireplace, said: "Do you not think that Innsbrück statue of King Arthur a fine figure?" The colleague flushed, the students shivered, the subject changed. And it was ever so.

He loved his fellow men and they loved him. His table was always filled with passing guests: colleagues from a distant point, the country doctor, the student who, coming to visit the clinic, was stunned to find himself carried away to luncheon with the great man that he had expected only to listen to from afar. "The master word in medicine," he said in one of his most beautiful addresses, "is work." But efficient work, he says in another, means inevitably system. He knew not idleness, and he put into his life and maintained in a manner which can only be described as masterful, a remarkable system.

At seven he rose; breakfast before eight. At a few minutes before nine he entered the hospital door. After a morning greeting to the superintendent, humming gaily, with arm passed through that of his assistant, he started with brisk, springing step down the corridor towards the wards. The other arm, if not waving gay or humorous greetings to nurses or students as they passed, was thrown around the neck or passed through the arm of another colleague or assistant, and by the time the ward was reached, the little group had generally grown like a small avalanche.

The visit over, to the private ward. For the many convalescents, or the nervous invalid whose mind needed diversion from self, some lively, droll greeting or absurd remark or preposterous and puzzling invention, and away to the next in an explosion of merriment, often amid the laughing but vain appeals of the patient for an opportunity to retaliate. For those who were gravely ill, few words, but a charming and reassuring manner. Then, running the gauntlet of a group of friends or colleagues or students or assistants, all with problems to discuss, he escaped. How? Heaven only knows!

A cold luncheon, always ready, shortly after one. Twenty

minutes rest in his room; then his afternoon hours. At half past four, in the parlor opposite his consulting room, the clans began to gather, graciously received by dear "Mrs. Chief," as Lady Osler was affectionately known. Soon the "Chief" entered with a familiar greeting for all. It was an anxious moment for those who had been waiting long for the word that they had been seeking with him. After five or ten minutes he would rise, and perhaps beckon to the lucky man to follow him to his study. More often he slipped quietly from the room and in a minute reappeared at the door in his overcoat, hat in hand. A gay wave of the hand, "Goodby," and he was off to his consultations.

Dinner at seven, to which, impartially and often, his assistants were invited. In the evening he did no set work, and retired early to his study where, his wife by the fire, he signed letters and cleared up the affairs of the day. Between ten and eleven o'clock, to bed. Such were his days. Three mornings in the week he took at home for ~~study~~ *work*. He utilized every minute of his time. Much of his summer vacation went to his studies. On railway, in cab, on his way to and from consultations, in tramway, and in the old "bob-tailed" car that used to carry us to the hospital, book and pencil were ever in his hand, and wherever he was, the happy thought was caught on the wing and noted down. His ability at a glance to grasp and to remember the gist of the article that he read was extraordinary.

His power to hold the mastery of his time was remarkable. He escaped as by magic, but so graciously, so engagingly that, despair though one might, he could hardly be irritated. No one could speak consecutively to Osler against his will. How did he do it? I know not.

His humor was irrepressible. It cropped out in everything. Now it was in medical articles, published under an amusing pseudonym, which were excruciatingly funny—reports of amazing cases, subjects which could lead no man astray, but have been seriously and solemnly quoted. Now it was a sly thrust at a colleague in the absurd title of a medical paper which mysteriously found its way into the program of a society meeting. Now it was the elaborately prepared counterfeit of a new journal, presented at a dinner, with a whole table of contents which brought horror to the hearts of the victims—and the rest a blank. His assistants had always to be on their guard. The genial

practical jokes played on his friends were endless, and so notorious that, alas, they have grown sadly with repetition. In a tight place he would pass under his *nom de plume*, unknown to the puzzled bore who had sought to nail him down. His generosity to his assistants was unending, and almost every gift, every act of kindness was accompanied by some droll and often really humorous mystification.

Wherever Osler went the charm of his personality brought men together; for the good in all men he saw, and as friends of Osler all men met in peace. Under his inspiration the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland took on a new life, and a new harmony reigned among all about him.

Throughout all his life Osler was a student of the lives of those who had gone before. Biography was to him of compelling interest, and in his numerous biographical essays, some of which have been collected in "An Alabama Student," he stimulated in his students a reverence for the great names of medicine, and an interest, sometimes as deep as his own, in the search for the recondite in the history of our art.

But above all this Osler was a scholar. In early life he had given little time to the classics. But few men have lived more completely in the atmosphere of the great minds of the past. An insatiate reader, his memory was remarkable, and the timely and happy quotation was always on his lips. Nightly, for half an hour, he communed with that which was best in literature. He loved books, and early laid the foundations of the great collection which was his at the time of his death—a collection, at the outset, of the first editions and early publications of the masters of medicine and later of like treasures in all branches of science and the humanities. At the time of his death he had accomplished the impossible—Osler, doctor of medicine and practitioner of his art, was president of the British Classical Association.

His occasional addresses, collected in part in "Æquanimitas and Other Addresses," were the mirror of his own ideals and his own character. Written in an engaging and forceful style, they contain much that is beautiful. But that which is more beautiful and more impressive than the words is the thought that Osler lived and practiced to the letter the precepts that he preached. He rarely spoke

of himself, but at the great farewell dinner in New York he talked briefly and touchingly of his ideals. These ideals he realized.

Some have criticized Osler for his reluctance to enter into combat against that of which, in his heart, he disapproved; some were inclined to regard him as one who shunned disagreeable complications rather than facing them. Osler did hate and shun useless strife, but when the time came—and he was a very wise judge of the proper moment—no one was more fearless or more outspoken than he, as more than one of his colleagues may remember. When the word must be spoken, he was ready to speak it regardless of what it might mean for himself.

His home life could scarcely have been more beautiful, and Lady Osler was no less dear than he to the immense circle that came to call them their friends. In Britain as in America, Osler's charm and brilliancy, his learning and his skill brought him the same universal affection and respect. He was made a baronet, a deserved honor. His house at Oxford became the Mecca of Americans. His hospitality knew no bounds. Sometimes forty or fifty guests would gather for afternoon tea.

There was but one child, Edward Revere Osler, a lad of but ten when they left America. In this boy Osler's life was centred. Always attractive and fond of outdoor life, he developed into a singularly charming character, with an interest in and an understanding of that which is beautiful in art and literature rare in one of his age. He began to collect books and to collect them intelligently. To his father this development was an inexpressible joy.

Surrounded by honors and love abroad, and with perfect happiness at home, a figure of growing significance among his colleagues of the old university, active in his profession and in the gathering and cataloguing of his wonderful library, the sky was clear—and the war came.

Whole-heartedly and without a bitter word, he gave himself as ever to the duties of the hour. In the medical department of the army his advice was sought on all manner of questions. He was consultant to a number of hospitals and in our hours of hesitation and delay he was active in stimulating his old students to come to the aid of those who were fighting our battles. Lady Osler was no less ac-

tive than he. The boy first worked at a hospital in France, then entered the Training Corps, joined the artillery, and left for the front. It was a strange picture, this man who all his life had been the apostle of "Unity, Peace and Concord" ("Æquanimity and Other Addresses," p. 447) flung suddenly with all that was nearest and dearest into the vortex of war. True to his own precepts he consumed his own smoke; there was never a lament or a complaint. But in his letters to those near to him the ever present anxiety for his boy was manifested by the inevitable reference made in brave, cheerful words to the sword that hung over their heads.

In August, 1917, cruelly wounded, Revere died, cared for, mercifully, by dear friends who chanced to be at his side. The blow Osler bore with calm dignity and beauty. The old life continued; his house, as ever, was open to all. In the last year of his life over sixteen hundred guests sat at his hospitable board. But it was a crushing blow from which he never recovered, and it killed that exuberant vitality which had promised so many long and fertile years. ~~Yet~~ With the same old cordiality he greeted his friends, with the same outward air of enthusiasm he went about his many activities. His address as president of the Classical Association was a contribution in which those who strive for the maintenance of high standards of scholarship in medicine will long take comfort.

The twelfth of July was his seventieth birthday. Two volumes of contributions to the medical sciences prepared in his honor by pupils and friends were presented to him by his colleague Sir Clifford Allbutt. His old students and companions in Baltimore united in dedicating their affectionate tributes to the beloved master. Testimonials of gratitude and affection poured in upon him from all sides. On few in their lifetime has such honor and love been showered. He was deeply moved. But his heart was broken. And when the test came, the old bodily vigor and resistance were gone.

In his last days he remembered as ever his associates of former years. Week by week he dictated or wrote letters from his sickbed first to one and then to another of his old friends. And when he could no longer write he asked those by him to write in his stead.

He was a keen observer, a brilliant clinician. His con-

tributions to medicine and medical education were important. He was a great teacher. But his main strength lay in the singular and unique charm of his presence, in the sparkling brilliancy of his mind, in the rare beauty of his character and of his life, and in the example that he set to his fellows and to his students. He was a quickening spirit.

At the meeting following his death, the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland adopted this minute:

Died

on 29 December, 1919, at Oxford,

WILLIAM OSLER, Baronet.

Physician, teacher, guide, lover of his fellow man.

Noble exemplar of charity and tolerance and temperance and work and love;

Untiring stimulator and generous benefactor of this Society;

Whose sparkling wit and genial, subtle humor smoothed the rough way of life for so many weary spirits;

Whose presence banished discord and suspicion.

The gap which his absence leaves among us will forever be warmed by the glow of that all-embracing love which radiated from his presence like a halo of light, and brought to all about him something of the peace that now is his.

